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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISTANBUL 000466

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SURVEY SHOWS HIGH LEVELS OF RELIGIOSITY AND
INTOLERANCE AMONG TURKS

REF: ISTANBUL 357

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON A. WIENER FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. Sabanci University political scientist Ali Carkoglu, together with Ersin Kalaycioglu, reported new research findings on religiosity in Turkey under the framework of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) that indicate a high level of religiosity among Turks and high levels of intolerance of non-Muslim religions. In a meeting with poloffs, Carkoglu commented on some of the study's findings, including the rise in religiosity among the study's youngest age bracket, and on separate studies that document a slight decline in the percentage of Turkish women who wear a headscarf. Carkoglu's academic perspective -- which lends a more rigorous social science methodology to the general discourse on Turkish cultural and political issues -- stands out among the more politically-charged analyses of religious trends in Turkey. End Summary.

Background on Religiosity Survey

12. (U) Mainstream news dailies Hurriyet and Milliyet recently published a summary of research on religiosity in Turkey conducted under the framework of the ISSP, which measures religious values from 43 different countries. The Turkish part of the study was conducted by Sabanci University professors Ali Carkoglu and Ersin Kalaycioglu, and poloffs met with Carkoglu in December to discuss the findings. The survey attempts to quantify the level of religiosity among populations, and this year is the first time that study data for this survey has been collected in Turkey. Turkey was the only country in this study with a Muslim-majority population. International data from the 2008 research is expected to be fully available in 2010.

Results Indicate High Religiosity, High Intolerance Among Turks

13. (SBU) Published summaries of the ISSP research indicate that 83 percent of Turks identify themselves as religious, with 16 percent saying they are extremely religious, 39 percent saying they are highly religious and 32 percent saying they are somewhat religious. Of the 43 countries surveyed, Turkey, Poland, the Philippines and the United States are among the most religious. According to Carkoglu, there has been a significant increase since 1999 in the number of people who self-identify as religious, something which he says could be related to the current political climate. According to the survey, 60 percent of Turks said there is only one true religion, while 34 percent

said most religions hold basic truths. On questions of religious tolerance, 90 percent of the Turkish population reported having a positive view toward Muslims, but this dropped to 13 percent for Christians and around 10 percent for Jews.

Those who said they have highly positive views about non-believers of any religion totaled 7 percent. While 42 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that religious people "should be tolerant," 49 percent of those surveyed said they would either "absolutely" or "most likely" not support a political party that accepted people from another religion.

Young Turks Show Biggest Rise in Religiosity

14. (C) In a meeting with poloffs on 4 December, Carkoglu commented on what he considered the study's most noteworthy findings. He said that when the results are broken down among age cohorts and compared to results of a similar study conducted in 1999, the rise in self-described religiosity becomes very apparent. The study's youngest cohort, born between 1972 and 1981, shows the most striking increase in religiosity since 1999, although not the highest overall level of religiosity. This group, which was 18 to 27 years old at the time of the 1999 survey, showed what Carkoglu called a "notable" rise in (self-assessed) religiosity. In 1999, 27 percent of this group described themselves as religious, a percentage that increased to 61 in 2009 (Note: Carkoglu said that he observed similar increases for other age cohorts, but they need to be cross checked and therefore

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remain provisional. End Note.). Asked to comment on this rise, Carkoglu pointed to political and cultural changes that occurred in Turkey during this group's formative years. This age cohort -- which is now 28 to 37 years old -- socialized into politics in the early 1980s, came of age when General Kenan Evren was lecturing to the masses, reading the Koran, and espousing anti-leftist, anti-communist views. The Iranian Revolution was very young, the Soviet threat real, and state-run Turkish Radio Television (TRT) was the only available source of news. Carkoglu further described changes during that time in religious education in schools that he said could have contributed to rising intolerance. In 1981-82, he said, the military imposed compulsory religious education in schools, but the curriculum was very biased, with no references to Shi'ism or non-Judeo Christian religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, or Baha'ism, all of which were viewed as "crazy" and "heretical." At that time, Turks increasingly began to refute the Anatolian heritage of Judeo-Christianity. Carkoglu suggested that these trends led to the departure of waves of non-Muslims from Turkey, which began in the 1950s but picked up again in the 1970s and 80s, leading to a "false self-confidence" of Muslims in Anatolia.

Examining Headscarf Trends

15. (C) Separately, Carkoglu commented on recent survey findings by respected pollster Adil Gur's A&G Polling Company that showed a decline in the percentage of Turkish women who are covering with headscarves. (Note: Turkish women who are covered may wear one of three types of headscarves, a "traditional" headscarf that leaves parts of the neck or hair visible and sometimes is knotted under the chin in urban areas; a "turban," which is larger, covers the hair and neck, and is generally viewed as a more politicized type of covering favored by younger women; and a more conservative full covering, the "carsaf," which is similar to the Iranian chador and is the least commonly worn in Turkey. End note.) Carkoglu, who first asked survey questions regarding headscarves in 1999, said that his findings support the idea that the percentage of Turkish women who are covered is declining, even though the raw number of covered women has increased. (Comment: due to a general population increase.

End comment.) He said that in 1999, just over 70 percent of Turkish women were covered, and of those 15-16 percent wore a turban, and only around 3 percent wore a carsaf. 2006 findings showed that the number of carsaf wearers had decreased to almost zero, and the percentage of women who wore the turban was around 11 percent. (Note: Carkoglu, in a recent article, said he had "more questions than answers" on the issue of the turban. For example, although political trends would suggest the turban would be worn more commonly in cities, data show that it is actually more popular in rural areas. Carkoglu told Poloffs that there is "very little empirical evidence that the turban really represents a new, modern woman." End note.) According to Carkoglu, the "mainstream media" were unhappy with his findings, and after the release of his 2006 survey data they quickly released shoddily-done or falsified polls that they contracted to commercial polling firms, which demonstrated that headscarves in Turkey were actually on the rise (Note: through poor sampling methods and questions that failed to distinguish between types of headscarf, according to Carkoglu. End note.).

16. (C) Carkoglu commented that the most important variables that apparently are linked to headscarf wearing in Turkey are 1) conservative family background and whether the mother is covered, 2) the woman's level of (self-assessed) religiosity, and 3) education levels. Additional influences include urbanism, economic condition evaluations, and income. According to survey data, if a mother wears a traditional headscarf, the daughter is also likely to wear a traditional headscarf, though 35-38 percent of these daughters are now uncovered, and a very small number has begun wearing a turban. If a mother wears a carsaf, the daughter is likely to switch to a traditional headscarf, but unlikely to uncover. As a general rule, if a woman has higher than a primary level education, she is more likely to be uncovered, and "activists" who wear a turban at higher levels of education are small in number, according to Carkoglu. Age plays a smaller role than some observers have guessed; older women are more likely to use a traditional headscarf than to remain uncovered or to wear a turban, but age does not distinguish turban wearers from those who do not cover their heads, and neither does marital status. Regarding political party

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preferences, Justice and Development Party (AKP) voters are clearly more likely to be covered, while Republican People's Party (CHP) voters are more likely to be uncovered, but head covering is not clearly tied with preferences outside of these two parties.

17. (C) Carkoglu guessed that most women who were applying for entrance to universities (and approximately 95 percent of Imam Hatip graduates take the university entrance exam, he said) probably would not risk being dismissed from university or not getting a job in order to wear a headcovering. He estimated that around a dozen of Sabanci University's approximately 3,000 total students currently wear headscarves. At Carkoglu's previous university, Bogazici University, there were a couple of women who wore turbans in class, and while Carkoglu never dismissed them from his class, he said that in the education, biology, or engineering departments the turbans would not have been tolerated and faculty members would have personally removed students wearing them from class or reported them to the university administration (Comment: Carkoglu suggested that this was tied to how permissive the faculty is to headscarves, and said that Istanbul University-- with 90,000 students-- had just elected to a leadership position a pro-AKP medical professor who also happens to be Prime Minister Erdogan's personal doctor. Carkoglu predicted because of this the rules would be relaxed at Istanbul University, which presumably was somehow "twisting the arms" of the media not to report on these violations. End Comment.). Other contacts (see reftel) have described university women wearing other types of head coverings, such as bulky hats and wigs, to get around

university regulations.

Comment

18. (C) Comment. Carkoglu, who holds a PhD from SUNY and is a regular contact of the Consulate, provides a unique window on political and social trends in Turkey because his academic research -- often funded by international research programs -- is not subject to the political winds that sometimes bend the results of commercial polling firms. His research on religiosity in Turkey with Professor Kalaycioglu represents a good step forward in inclusion of Turkey on international surveys of this type, which will help to benchmark trends in Turkish society for the future. Carkoglu's comments on headscarves, which echo what respected pollster Adil Gur told us in October, add a new dimension to conversations on the headscarf issue in Turkey. Although Carkoglu did not say whether headscarves are a political statement, a religious expression, or a traditional accessory, his research suggests that headscarves cross all of these categories in Turkey. Carkoglu's findings indicate that women's decisions to some extent reflect their political preferences in addition to their religiosity. Other contacts (reftel) have commented that they are troubled by the growing prevalence of headscarves in Istanbul, but debate the reasons behind this perceived growth. Carkoglu's work suggests that perceptions -- and not necessarily real numbers -- may be driving these views, although some contend that changes in the political environment under the AKP have made it more common for covered women to spend time public spaces, a plausible claim that also could be shaping these perceptions. End Comment.

WIENER